

Historic Sites

*Menotomy, Settled 1635*  
*West Cambridge, Incorporated 1807*  
*Arlington, Renamed 1867*

A. Arlington Civic Block

The area known as Menotomy was settled by English Puritans around 1635. Within a few years, many of the major roads were laid out-Massachusetts Avenue (1636), Pleasant Street (1638), and Mystic Street (1643).

At the junction of Massachusetts Avenue and Pleasant Street, a new meeting house was built in 1734, the Second Parish of Cambridge. On the same corner today, you can see the modern First Parish Unitarian Universalist Church, built after the fourth parish building burned in 1975. Next to the church is the **Old Burying Ground**, which received its first burial about 1735. A small section of the early (1762-1783) stone wall that surrounded the grounds still stands behind the church. Both Minutemen and British soldiers, who died on April 19, 1776, are buried here. An old granite obelisk marks the common grave of 12 Minutemen from Menotomy and other Middlesex towns.

Always the most prestigious address on the avenue, the **Whittemore-Robbins House** is a Federal-style mansion built about 1800, the earliest building remaining on the Civic Block. William Whittemore, first resident of the house, owned a factory on this site. With his brother Amos, he manufactured the cards used to straighten cotton and wool fibers before they are spun into yarn. The invention of the machine to make cards ensured the prosperity of both the Whittemores and West Cambridge.

In 1847, Nathan Robbins, then the wealthiest citizen of Arlington, bought the house. Nathan, a widower, was joined by the four children of his late son Orrin: Ida, Olney, Eliza, and Caira. Their family, especially the Robbins sisters, contributed much to Arlington. In 1931, Ida and Caira gave their house to the Town. Now restored, the house is used as a function facility and for Town offices, including the Department of Human Services and the Arlington Historical Commission, curators for the Whittemore-Robbins House.

In 1890, the Whittemore-Robbins House was rotated 90° and moved back to its present location to make room for the **Robbins Memorial Library**. This impressive building includes the highly ornamented Reading Room. Additions were built in 1930 and 1994.

In 1894, a new high school was built at the corner of Academy and Maple Streets. Designed by the firm of Hartwell and Richardson, the red brick towers and turrets reflect the Romanesque style popular at the time. Today the building holds a Senior Center and offices.

The **Robbins Memorial Town Hall and Winfield Robbins Memorial Garden** were also donated to the Town by the Robbins family. The Town Hall was dedicated in the summer of 1913 with a large ceremony and pageant. The Robbins sisters asked the noted architect R. Clipston Sturgis to design the building and to lay out the grounds as an “ornamental park.” *Menotomy Indian Hunter* by Cyrus Dallin is the central feature of the garden. Dallin, who lived and worked in Arlington, is known for his sculpture, *Appeal to the Great Spirit*, in front of the Museum of Fine Arts in Boston. The present garden design was completed by the Olmsted firm in 1939. The garden and Town Hall are on the National Register of Historic Places.

B. Arlington Fire Stations

There are three fire stations in Arlington, all designed by George Ernest Robinson, a Belmont architect. The Central Fire Station (1926) was the first octagonal fire station in the United States, allowing fire trucks to emerge simultaneously in six directions. The tall tower was built to dry fire hoses easily.

Built a few years later, the Highland Fire Station is on Massachusetts Avenue near Brattle Square. The Park Circle Fire Station, serving Arlington Heights, is near the **Park Circle Water Tower**.

C. Arlington Historic Districts

Arlington is fortunate to have seven historic districts located throughout the town. Most recently, in 2002, the Pleasant Street Historic District was expanded to include Pelham Terrace. Other districts are Jason-Gray, Avon Place, Mt. Gilboa, Broadway, Russell Street, and Central Street. The “historic district” designation documents and protects the architectural character and significance of early neighborhoods. Each district is administered by a volunteer neighborhood commission under Town By-laws and Commonwealth statutes.

D. Battle of Menotomy, April 19, 1775

Some of the first encounters between British regulars and Minutemen occurred in what is now Arlington. Markers along Massachusetts Avenue indicate significant sites and events of the historic day, April 19, 1775. Erected in 1878 for the centennial celebration of the American Revolution, granite markers tell the stories of Menotomy citizens and places which include the Black Horse Tavern where the Committee of Safety met on the night before the battle. Sites of several skirmishes are also marked.



**Foot of the Rocks** is located at the junction of Lowell Street and Massachusetts Avenue. Here Minutemen from 30 towns gathered to ambush the British on their retreat from Lexington and Concord. The rocky wooded hillside offered protection to the Minutemen who fired on the British. Lord Percy turned his cannon around on the patriots and that afternoon, as Percy retreated, more men died in the Battle of Menotomy than in any other location on April 19, 1775.

The **Jason Russell Farmhouse** (ca. 1740) is the site of Arlington’s annual reenactment of the battle. After a failed ambush on the British soldiers, Jason Russell and eleven others were pursued inside the house and slain there. The kitchen is said to have been ankle deep in the blood of the patriots, and to this day several bullet holes can be seen in the house. Today the house is the headquarters of the Arlington Historical Society and is open to the public.



In the early hours of the morning of April 19th, both **Paul Revere** and **William Dawes** rode through the town warning of the approach of the British. Every year on Patriots’ Day, their rides are repeated through the town.

The marker to the heroics of Samuel Whittemore, now in **Whittemore Park** on Massachusetts Avenue in Arlington Center, reads “Near this spot, Samuel Whittemore, then 80 years old, killed three British soldiers April 19, 1775. He was shot, bayoneted, beaten and left for dead, but recovered, and lived to be 98 years of age.” Samuel Whittemore’s grave is in the Old Burying Ground.



E. Cooke’s Hollow

The small park at **Cooke’s Hollow** is built where Mill Brook emerges and flows on toward the Mystic Lakes. Here you can see a drop in elevation, indicating the location of a dam that created a large mill pond above it. There were mills on this site until the early 1900’s. The last mill buildings burned in 1928.

The park is named for Captain George Cooke, recipient of the original grant of a mill privilege on Mill Brook. His grist mill, built about 1637 near this site, was the first to supply the area with ground corn. Cooke served in many public posts, including Speaker of the Massachusetts House of Representatives.

F. Jefferson Cutter House

Built about 1819, this house with its ornate entry originally stood farther west on Massachusetts Avenue near the corner of Quinn Road. Now restored, the house stands in Whittemore Park in Arlington Center. It holds the Arlington Chamber of Commerce Visitor’s Center and features the **Cyrus E. Dallin Museum**.

The Cutters are one of the oldest families in Arlington. As early as 1637, William Cutter farmed in the area, and by the time of the battle at the Foot of the Rocks, the Cutter family owned the rights to operate three mills, including a grist mill where the Old Schwamb Mill stands today, and a sawmill near Mill St. off Massachusetts Ave.

G. Main Post Office

The **Main Post Office**, built in 1936, is on Court Street in Arlington Center. Inside is a large mural, painted by William C. Palmer in 1938, under the WPA Federal Art Project. *Purchase and Use of the Soil* has three sections depicting the history of Arlington: (1) the acquisition of Menotomy lands from the Squaw Sachem, (2) men and women working on the farms of Arlington, and (3) a panel that shows wild and domesticated plants and animals.

H. The Old Schwamb Mill

On a water powered mill site, first developed in 1650, stands **The Old Schwamb Mill**. The mill had many lives as a grist, saw, plaster, and spice mill before Charles Schwamb purchased the buildings in 1864. Schwamb converted the mill to manufacture high quality curved wooden picture frames. The frames were popular, and his business prospered. Today, this working museum still manufactures oval and circular picture frames with original machinery and tools. The mill is on the National Register of Historic Places and is open to visitors.

J. Park Circle Water Tower

The water tower, built between 1921 and 1924, was modeled after the Greek temples the Robbins sisters saw in their travels. Donated to the Town by the sisters, the reservoir replaced an earlier standpipe and holds 2 million gallons of water.

The building was designed by an Arlington architect, Frederick F. Low, and it stands on one of the highest hills in Arlington, 377 feet above sea level. Today it is part of the Massachusetts Water Resources Authority.

K. Prince Hall Mystic Cemetery

On Gardner Street in East Arlington there is a monument in a small park on the site of the only Black Masonic Cemetery in the United States. The cemetery, dedicated in 1864, held members of the Prince Hall Grand Lodge F & AM, formed in 1776. Though much of the cemetery land has since been developed, a geophysical survey of the site in 1988 found remains of the original gate and an obelisk.

L. Smith Museum

The **George A. Smith Museum**, operated by the Arlington Historical Society, features exhibits based on the society’s collections. Adjacent to the Jason Russell House, the museum and house are open to visitors.

In the 1960’s, donations from the Elizabeth Smith family made it possible to purchase and remove the structures that hid the Jason Russell House, thus restoring the open corner at Massachusetts Avenue and Jason Street.



M. Uncle Sam Monument

Samuel Wilson was born in Menotomy in 1766. After moving to New Hampshire as an adolescent, he settled in Troy, NY, where he was known as “Uncle Sam” because of his sunny disposition. During the War of 1812, he worked as a supplier of meat to the U.S. Army. The translation of the U.S. label stamped on his meat containers became synonymous with “Uncle Sam.” With the creation of the cartoon figure dressed in red, white, and blue that personifies the United States, the legend of Uncle Sam grew. Arlington’s monument, created by Theodore Barbarosa and dedicated in 1977, can be found in **Uncle Sam Park**.

Town of Arlington  
Recreational Facilities

Map #	Location												
		Baseball	Basketball	Field Hockey	Football	Ice Skating	Playground / Tot Lot	Soccer / Lacrosse	Softball / Little League	Tennis	Track	Water Facilities	
4	Bishop School	X				X	X	X					
5	Brackett School	X				X							
7	Buck Field							X*					
8	Buzzell Field	X		X***		X		X**					
10	Crosby School Park / Playground	X				X	X*		X				
11	Cutter Park / Reinhart Playground					X							
12	Dallin School					X							
13	Florence Avenue Park	X				X	X	X					
14	Gibbs School	X				X							
16	Hardy School	X				X							
17	Hibbert Street Park					X							
18	Hill's Hill						X*						
19	Hurd Field		X				X*	X**					
20	Locke School Playground					X							
21	Magnolia Park / Playground	X				X	X						
23	Menotomy Rocks Park				X	X							
27	North Union Park / Lussiano	X	X			X	X	X			X		
28	Ottoson Middle School					X*	X						
29	Parallel Park	X				X							
30	Parmenter School Playground	X				X							
31	Peirce School	X				X							
32	Poets Corner	X				X	X*	X					
33	Reed's Brook			**	**	**	**	**					
2	Reservoir Beach / Mt. Gilboa Playground					X					X		
34	Robbins Farm / Skyline Playground	X	X			X	X*						
35	Scannell-Santini Field (Linwood Street)							X					
36	Spy Pond Field / Park / Playground	X				X	X	X	X				
37	Stratton School / Greeley Playground		X			X							
38	Summer Street Field / Playground	X***	X	X		X							
39	Thorndike Field					X							
3	Veterans' Memorial Rink / Recreation Office				X								
41	Waldo Playground (Teet Street)		X			X							
42	Warren A. Peirce Field / Arlington High School	X	X***	X***		X***	X		X				
43	Wellington Park (Grove Street)					X		X					
44	Whittemore-Robbins House Grounds					X							

Municipal Contact Information

Emergency 911

Police Department (non-emergency) 781-316-3900  
Fire Department (non-emergency) 781-316-3800

Town Offices 781-316-3000  
Public Works 781-316-3300  
Recreation Department 781-316-3880  
Conservation Commission 781-316-3012  
Historical Commission 781-316-3275

Town Website www.town.arlington.ma.us

Map Of  
ARLINGTON

Massachusetts

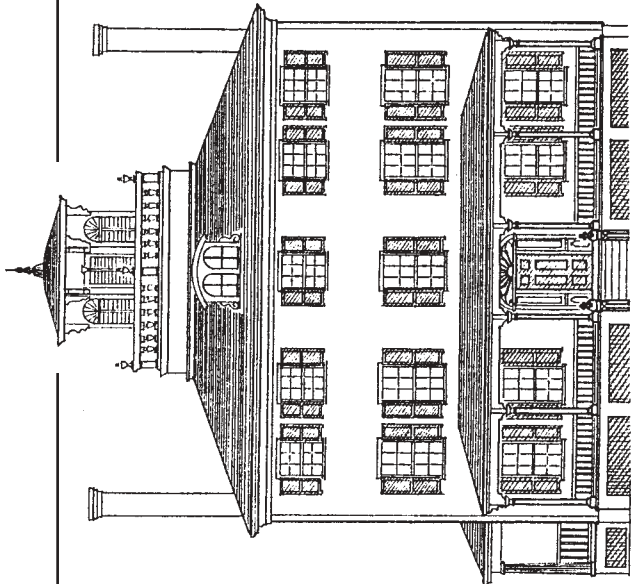
featuring

HISTORIC SITES

PARKS & OPEN SPACE

RECREATION LOCATIONS

Second Edition, 2002



WHITTEMORE - ROBBINS HOUSE  
Massachusetts Ave. / Civic Block